



Article

A retrospective of LGBT issues on US college campuses: 1990–2020

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Abstract

In this brief retrospective of LGBT issues on US College Campuses: 1990–2020, the authors first review the extensive changes in the language used to ‘define’ people within these communities. Given the fluid and evolving language used in sexual and gender minority communities, it is crucial to examine how community members are named and who is centered as a result of this naming. The authors use the terms queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum to honor how individuals choose to identify themselves as opposed to placing them into socially constructed, fixed categories of sexuality and gender. Next, they explore how the climate has changed in higher education to support queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum students. Finally, the authors examine the research on how queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum students experience their campuses and the climate’s influence on specific outcomes. This retrospective contends that higher education scholars must continue to examine outcomes that will facilitate success for queer- and trans-spectrum student populations.

Keywords

Higher education, homosexuality, sexuality, social justice

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The birth of the gay rights movement in the United States is often attributed to the Stonewall Riots in the summer of 1969. However, even before the events at the Stonewall Inn, gay students at several colleges and universities (e.g., Columbia, Cornell) were forming underground societies (Beemyn, 2003a; Graves, 2018). The covert nature of these student groups was due, in part, to campus climates that were less than welcoming. For example, in 1920, a 'secret court' of five administrators was appointed to investigate charges of homosexual activity among students (Wright, 2005). During the 1940s, at least three public universities expelled students and fired faculty who were, or, were presumed to be, homosexual (Nash and Silverman, 2015). A climate of fear, due to campus administrations covertly searching for 'homosexual' faculty, staff, and students, sent queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum people underground. Although little is known about these early activists, the documentation offered by historians is 'white' and 'gay/lesbian' and does not include the narratives or struggles of transgender, nonbinary, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, intersex, aromantic, demisexual people, nor those in the community identifying outside of a white racial identity (see Graves, 2018). The history suggests, as one young activist offers, a 'tension between the assimilationists, who wanted to merely become a part of the heteronormative world, and the revolutionaries who wanted to shake off heteronormativity, and create a world not defined by arbitrary and oppressive systems' (Turner, 2015: para. 4).

Fueled by an arguably more accepting national culture, the last three decades have allowed queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum students, faculty, and staff to be more visible on US college and university campuses. As evidenced by the implementation of inclusive policies (e.g., gender identity and sexual identity included in institutional nondiscrimination policies, gender-inclusive housing) and specific programs to support queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum students (e.g., gender and sexuality centers, Lavender graduation), colleges and universities are working towards creating more welcoming campuses (Marine, 2011). Yet, it is not evident if changes happening in collegiate settings have resulted in more positive outcomes for queer- and trans-spectrum individuals.

There are considerable difficulties in conducting outcome-based research among queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum students, including lack of institutional data (Rankin and Garvey, 2015) and the dearth of sexual identity and gender identity data in national higher education survey instruments (Garvey, 2014). Rankin and Garvey (2015: 9) succinctly captured the conundrum of these two challenges, observing, '[a]s a scholarly community, we find ourselves in a catch-22, whereby certain social identities are under-researched, yet survey developers do not include these demographic questions because of a lack of empirical research on these populations.' These authors noted that, while a select number of national datasets have provided a strong foundation for innovative empirical analyses, they have yet to incorporate items measuring sexual identity and gender identity. More recently, several US national student surveys have incorporated sexual and gender identity questions (2017 National Survey of Student Engagement, 2017 Undergraduate Student Experience at the Research University Survey, 2016 American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment, 2016 Higher Education Research Institute surveys). The survey results provide not only prevalence data, but also offer some insights into health and academic outcomes for queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum students.

In this brief retrospective of LGBT issues on US college campuses from 1990 to 2020, we first review the extensive changes in the language used to ‘define’ people within these communities. Given the fluid and evolving language used in sexual and gender minority communities, we feel it is crucial to examine how community members are named and who is centered as a result of this naming. In our work, we use the terms queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum to honor how individuals choose to identify themselves as opposed to placing them into socially constructed, fixed categories of sexuality and gender. Next, we explore how the climate has changed in higher education focusing on campus environments to support queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum students. Finally, we examine the research on how queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum students experience their campuses and the climate’s influence on specific outcomes. This retrospective contends that higher education scholars must continue to examine outcomes that will facilitate success for queer- and trans-spectrum student populations.

Who are queer- and trans-spectrum students?

The ways that researchers have named and studied queer- and trans-spectrum communities in higher education has shifted drastically since the 1990s. In reviewing the scholarship on queer- and trans-spectrum students in higher education over the past three decades, clear connections exist between how researchers name populations and who is centered in the disciplinary discourse. As Graves (2018) noted, the research on queer- and trans-spectrum individuals oftentimes mirrors the movements occurring in LGBTQ history broadly. What this signifies is that an increased visibility of diverse identities in society and LGBTQ communities over time has resulted in scholarship exploring the wide range of groups that identify as queer- and trans-spectrum. For example, whereas literature on queer- and trans-spectrum people initially centered the experiences of those who identified as gay and lesbian (see Tierney and Dilley [1998] for an early account of gay and lesbian issues in education), studies gradually expanded to include an attention to diverse sexualities and genders (Renn, 2010). In recent years, researchers have also sought to understand the multiple identities queer- and trans-spectrum students hold that influence their realities. To show the evolution in how scholars have labeled and examined this community’s experiences, the following sections will describe these trends in greater detail.

Expanding research on varying sexualities and genders

In the early 1990s, much of the literature on queer- and trans-spectrum individuals involved published personal accounts from gay and lesbian people (Graves, 2018), together with research that similarly investigated the experiences of these groups (Renn, 2010). As the 1990s continued, empirical studies completed at collegiate institutions started to research bisexual students under the umbrella of LGB, especially in the late 1990s (e.g., Love, 1998; Rhoads, 1997). Moving from homosexual and gay/lesbian to lesbian, gay, and bisexual represented a paradigmatic shift away from thinking of queer-spectrum collegians as a monolithic group, striving to comprehend the nuances that come with various sexualities (Rhoads, 1997).

The beginning of the 21st century then signaled another substantial change in how researchers conceptualized queer- and trans-spectrum student experiences. Specifically, a growing amount of literature in the early 2000s attended to the lives of trans-spectrum individuals on college campuses (e.g., Beemyn, 2003b; Bilodeau, 2005; McKinney, 2005). Although some scholars utilized samples exclusively comprised of trans-spectrum students, others grouped this population alongside sexual minorities, leading to the rise of research on LGBT students (e.g., Brown et al., 2004; Ivory, 2005). Yet, researchers warned against seeing queer- and trans-spectrum experiences as homogeneous, arguing that substantial differences exist between how people negotiate their gender identity and sexuality in college (Dilley, 2003).

The period between 2000 and 2010 also represented a time when scholars in higher education began to utilize the term 'queer' as a way to depict the fluidity of sexuality and gender, as well to describe an identity category. Using influences from queer theory allowed researchers to destabilize static understandings of sexuality and gender, leading to new ways of comprehending queer- and trans-spectrum individuals in colleges and universities (e.g., Abes and Kasch, 2007; Dilley, 2002). For example, Dilley (2002) used queer theory to describe the ways that sexual identity was fluid for non-heterosexual men navigating college campuses and other environments. This interest in seeing identity as more expansive led to the more regular inclusion of 'Q' in the abbreviation LGBTQ (though at times, the 'Q' refers to 'questioning'). Nevertheless, as Garvey (2017) argued, a tension exists in using 'queer' as an identity category in itself, especially in quantitative studies, because it may resist the very fluidity that queerness hopes to communicate. While some apply LGBTQ as an umbrella term, others opt for 'queer' as a label that describes people who contest normalized heterosexual and gender categories (Marine, 2011). As ideas about sexuality and gender continued to develop, researchers in higher education progressively shined a light on previously under-researched populations on the queer- and trans-spectrum.

In Renn's (2010) manuscript on the state of LGBT and queer research, she argued that certain demographics remained understudied in higher education. In essence, much of the scholarship prior to 2010 pertained to the LGBTQ abbreviation, and more often than not, those who were LGBQ. Yet, in this past decade, scholars have taken a particular interest in understanding the experiences of those who identify with identities outside of the LGB umbrella. For example, researchers have steadily included pansexual students in qualitative (King, 2011; Vaccaro and Newman, 2017) and quantitative studies (Garvey et al., 2018c). Furthermore, researchers have sought to comprehend how asexual collegians navigate experiences during college (Mollet and Lackman, 2018). In particular, Mollet and Lackman (2018) revealed how asexual students may feel as though they do not belong under the umbrella of the LGBTQ community with some participants stating that the abbreviation should read 'LGBTQA' ('A' standing for asexuality and not ally). This body of research ultimately showcases the political nature that naming holds in literature on queer- and trans-spectrum communities in higher education, especially as it pertains to who has the privilege of being included.

Another example of a previously under-researched population concerned the experiences of trans-spectrum students. Though research on these collegians slowly appeared between 2000 and 2010, Renn (2010) contended that a lack of scholarship still existed

about this population of students. After the publication of Renn's (2010) manuscript, researchers such as Catalano (2015, 2017), Jourian (2017, 2018), and Nicolazzo (2016, 2017) largely contributed to this gap in the literature. Significantly, these scholars added complex understandings of trans-spectrum people in higher education by taking a pointed focus on trans men (Catalano, 2015, 2017), trans*masculine individuals (Jourian, 2017, 2018), and those who identify as nonbinary (Nicolazzo, 2016). Rather than investigate transgender student experiences broadly, these scholars examined specific sub-demographics along the trans-spectrum. What these studies reveal is that over the last 30 years, a shift has occurred away from binary categories towards scholarship that explores the different identities that exist on the queer- and trans-spectrum. Yet, it is important to note that literature in higher education has increasingly discussed how sexuality and gender intersect with other social identities, providing additional nuance to how professionals understand this population.

Within-group differences in queer- and trans-spectrum communities

As research in higher education has progressively evolved, scholars have revealed the within-group differences that exist in queer- and trans-spectrum groups. The majority of this scholarship emerged in the 21st century, though some exceptions do exist (e.g., Dumas, 1998; Wall and Washington, 1991). What this area of research communicates is that queer- and trans-students hold other identities that substantially shape their lives as gender and sexual minorities. Importantly, these intersecting identities may lead to students feeling a disconnection from larger queer- and trans-spectrum communities that frequently uphold norms relating to whiteness, able-bodiedness, and class privilege. This literature has most prominently illuminated the interconnections between queer- and trans-spectrum identities and race (Duran, 2018; Johnson and Javier, 2017), spirituality (e.g., Gold and Stewart, 2011; Love et al., 2005; Means, 2017), and ability (e.g., Miller, 2018).

Studies on queer-spectrum students of color began to grow after the 2000s. Rather than grouping these individuals with queer-spectrum individuals as a whole, scholars argued that a need existed to examine the racialized experiences of sexual minorities (Duran, 2018). Initially, the research focused on Black gay men (Henry et al., 2011; Mitchell and Means, 2014). More recent scholarship broadened the 'people of color' demographic to include the experiences of queer-spectrum Latinx/a/o and Asian/Asian American people (Duran, 2018). Regardless of their specific racial identity, the results of these studies suggest queer-spectrum students of color are less likely to adopt the labels of gay or lesbian as these are white social constructs (Goode-Cross and Good, 2008; Patton, 2011). These findings underscore the limitations that come with how students are named in the scholarship, as well as how they are engaged in research and practice in higher education.

At the time of this retrospective, few studies were found that specifically examined the experiences of trans-spectrum students of color (e.g., Garvey et al., 2019; Jourian, 2017; Nicolazzo, 2016). The paucity of research on trans-spectrum students overall, and more specifically, trans-spectrum students of color in higher education leads to a lack of understanding of these students' challenges in navigating higher education. Similarly,

Duran (2018) noted that scholars have yet to substantially study the lives of Native queer and two-spirit people on college campuses. Though exceptions do exist (see Martin, 2013), the experiences of those who identify as Indigenous and within queer- and trans-spectrum communities is another area rich for exploration.

In addition to race, recent studies have illuminated the interconnections between spirituality and queer-spectrum communities (e.g., Gold and Stewart, 2011; Love et al., 2005; Means, 2017). A large portion of this scholarship articulated how having a spiritual background may lead to increased tension in reconciling one's sexual minority identity. Additionally, recent work considered how race, spirituality, and queer-spectrum identities collectively affect a student's connection to their sexuality (e.g., Means, 2017). Finally, another intersection that has begun emerging in the past decade concerns the relationship between ability status and queer-spectrum identities. Specifically, research such as Miller (2018) illuminated the varying ways that queer-spectrum students with disabilities perceive their multiple marginalized identities. Though some collegians saw their identities as intersectional or interactive, others believed that their identities were incompatible or that the compounding effect of having a disability and identifying as sexual minorities meant they could not relate to other queer-spectrum individuals. Yet, in looking at the research pertaining to spirituality and ability, few prominent studies interrogate the relationship between these identities and trans-spectrum individuals. Recognizing that spirituality and ability status can influence how connected trans-spectrum students feel to the larger queer- and trans-spectrum community signifies a need for additional research on this topic. Not only have researchers expanded the view of who queer and trans-spectrum people are since the 1990s, they have also investigated the role that collegiate environments play in the lives of this population.

Queer- and trans-spectrum students in collegiate environments

In addition to focusing inwardly on the identities and experiences of queer- and trans-spectrum students, higher education scholars have focused outwardly on the ways in which these students interact with college and university environments. However, summarizing the influence of collegiate environments on queer- and trans-spectrum student experiences is daunting in its scope for several reasons. First, postsecondary institutions are dynamic systems with nested ecological structures. Renn and Arnold (2003) posited that students' experiences are a result of the interaction between unique environmental systems in which they live and interact, emphasizing peer culture and student environments. These environments are conceptualized in terms of nested systems, and include microsystems (i.e., influential groups in which students belong), mesosystems (i.e., interactions of students' microsystems), exosystems (i.e., laws, policies, and structures), macrosystems (i.e., pervasive cultural norms and systems), and the chronosystem (i.e., historical conditions and events). Such an ecological approach enables researchers and policymakers to examine queer and trans student experiences in higher education sociologically, examining the interrelatedness of individual and interpersonal narratives, policies and resources for queer- and trans-spectrum students in higher education (e.g., student services, all-gender housing), and state and federal laws (e.g., Title IX, nondiscrimination laws).

Second, the historical exclusion of sexuality and trans identities in federal and state government data collection, higher education datasets from research centers, and institutional data from colleges and universities has hindered the development of studies about queer- and trans-spectrum students. For example, Garvey (2014) conducted a study to explore highly-used higher education and student affairs survey instruments from 2010 to 2012 and found that of the 10 most widely used survey instruments, only four asked about sexual identity and two included transgender identity. Without national data, higher education researchers have had difficulty examining the influence of college environments on queer- and trans-spectrum student experiences, which has drastic consequences for institutional advocacy, policy reform, and resource allocation (Rankin and Garvey, 2015).

In the following sections, we overview campus climate as an influential concept that has shaped scholars' understanding of queer- and trans-spectrum students' experiences within campus environments. We first introduce campus climate conceptually and theoretically, followed by a closer examination of campus climate perceptions among queer- and trans-spectrum students. This section closes with an overview of two environmental influences among queer- and trans-spectrum students that have been heavily studied among higher education scholars: housing accommodation and academic environments.

Campus climate

In her historical overview of existing literature addressing LGBTQ issues in higher education, Renn (2010) identified that since the 1980s, a large body of scholarship has focused on campus climate experiences and perceptions. Campus climate describes 'the cumulative attitudes, behaviors, and standards of employees and students concerning access for, inclusion of, and level of respect for individual and group needs, abilities, and potential' (Rankin, 2005: 17). Campus climate is an integral component of undergraduate student experiences because of its strong relationship with student success and persistence (Mayhew et al., 2016). Campus climate has been used conceptually to explore experiences with discrimination across roles (e.g., students, faculty, staff) and through individual and multiple social identities, including queer- and trans-spectrum people in higher education.

Queer- and trans-spectrum campus climate

As noted earlier, before 2005, data availability and the complexity of studying college environments limited national studies about queer- and trans-student experiences. Within the past 15 years, several large-scale survey designs have paved a recent trajectory for research examining queer- and trans-spectrum student success within curricular and co-curricular environments. In 2003, Rankin developed a national campus LGBT climate study in partnership with the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. Her study examined the experiences of LGBT people, their perceptions of campus climate, and perceptions of institutional responses to LGBT issues and concerns. The respondent sample included 1669 LGBT student respondents across 14 colleges and universities in the USA, and was the largest sampling completed at the time. Rankin et al. (2010) continued the earlier

work of Rankin (2003) with the *State of Higher Education for LGBT People*, which was the most comprehensive national research study of its kind and included over 5000 LGBTQ students, faculty, staff, and administrators. The expansion of experiences across institutional positions and a heightened focus on the intersections of racial, sexual, and gender identity provided richer understandings of climate among queer- and trans-spectrum individuals in higher education.

Two other queer- and trans-specific national studies have also contributed to the depth of utilized concurrent, mixed methods. *The National Study of LGBTQ+ Student Success* (Pitcher et al., 2018) examined personal and environmental factors that contribute to academic, social, and personal success for LGBTQ college and university students in the USA. Participant recruitment occurred at the 2013 Midwest Bisexual Lesbian Gay Transgender Ally College Conference as well as from online LGBTQ networks, and included 952 respondents for the survey and 60 for individual interviews. *The National LGBTQ Alumnx Survey* was administered in 2014 and enabled respondents to provide quantitative and narrative insights regarding their experiences as LGBTQ undergraduate students and graduates (Garvey, 2016). The survey focused on five interrelated topics: demographic information, undergraduate student experiences, alumnx experiences, and philanthropy/giving. The total response for the survey was 3121 and included participants from all 50 states and Puerto Rico.

What has also contributed to the recent emergence of national studies about queer- and trans-spectrum students within college environments is the addition of sexuality and trans demographic questions in national higher education surveys. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) noted the importance of national surveys in higher education research, writing that '[A] number of national [American] data sets, which produce a substantial portion of the evidence on the impact of college on students, have become targets of opportunity for large numbers of social scientists' (p. 15). Notably, the *National Survey of Student Engagement*, administered by the Center for Postsecondary Research at Indiana University, added sexuality and trans demographic questions in 2014 (Indiana University School of Education, n.d.). The 2015 *Freshman¹ Survey* administered by the Higher Education Research Institute allowed students to identify their sexual orientation and/or trans identity for the first time in the survey's history (Eagan et al., 2016). Both surveys opened ample opportunities for higher education scholars to have large-scale nationally representative samples to explore the role of campus environments in queer- and trans-student experiences and outcomes.

Queer- and trans-spectrum students in US college/university environments

Particularly in regard to the experience of queer- and trans-spectrum students, current campus climate research discourse presents a grand narrative of progressive change, greater access to resources, increased programming, and growing multicultural competence (Fine, 2012; Marine, 2011; Rankin et al., 2015). Garvey et al. (2017) examined campus climate perceptions from alumnx across 3121 LGBTQ undergraduate students who graduated from 1944 through 2013 and found differences in LGBTQ student

campus climate perceptions across generations. Their results highlighted key academic experiences, co-curricular experiences, and institutional environments as influential to LGBTQ student climate perceptions, and empirical evidence that demonstrated generational progress and improved perceptions of campus climate for LGBTQ students.

Studies about queer- and trans-student campus climate perceptions have continued to center on three areas: perceptions and experiences of LGBTQ people, perceptions about LGBTQ people and their experiences, and the status of policies and programs designed to serve LGBTQ collegians (Renn, 2010). Consistent with Rankin and Reason's (2008) transformational tapestry model, there are two key environmental influences that have been heavily studied among higher education scholars examining queer- and trans-spectrum students: university policy/services and curriculum/pedagogy. Below are examples of relevant variables within both key environmental influences, including housing accommodations and academic disciplines.

Regarding university policies and services, a substantial body of scholarship has focused on housing accommodation and a restrictive binary structure for students living on campus (Fanucce and Taub, 2010; Kortegast, 2017). The oppressive gendered contexts of housing have negative implications for queer- and trans-spectrum students because these individuals encounter discrimination within residence life (Kortegast, 2017). Specifically, trans-spectrum students suffer heterogendered housing practices and policies that force them to either live by themselves or leave campus (Bilodeau, 2009; Nicolazzo and Marine, 2015; Pryor et al., 2016). Encouraging queer- and trans-spectrum students to move off-campus is an ineffective solution to serving these individuals because among all students, those who live off-campus experience more social isolation and less access to campus resources (Mayhew et al., 2016). In recent years, scholars have begun exploring gender-inclusive housing as an intentional – rather than promising – strategy (Nicolazzo et al., 2018) to promote more welcoming environments for trans- and queer-spectrum collegians (Garvey et al., 2018b).

Numerous scholars have documented the negative experiences of LGBTQ college students in academic environments (Billimoria and Stewart, 2009; Gortmaker and Brown, 2006; Linley and Nguyen, 2015; Patridge et al., 2014; Sevecke et al., 2015). Academic disciplines have great influence on queer- and trans-spectrum student outcomes because they are a critical microclimate of students' college environments (Vaccaro, 2012). On the one hand, certain disciplines may be chilly and uninviting for queer- and trans-spectrum students, including science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) majors (Patridge et al., 2014). On the other hand, other disciplines like the social sciences and humanities are typically more welcoming of LGBTQ people (Brown et al., 2004). Negative academic experiences may lead queer- and trans-spectrum students to feel silenced and detached from classroom dynamics (Renn, 2010). These students may feel invisible as they do not see their experiences or identities represented in curricula (Gortmaker and Brown, 2006; Linley and Nguyen, 2015; Patridge et al., 2014; Renn, 2010). Negative experiences and unfair treatment by faculty then impact queer- and trans-spectrum students' perceptions of climate and likelihood of leaving campus (Tetreault et al., 2013). Conversely, validating practices inside and outside the classroom (e.g., introducing inclusive language, creating community standards) also contribute to

student involvement and, ultimately, student persistence (BrckaLorenz et al., 2017; Garvey and Inkelas, 2012; Garvey et al., 2018a, 2018d).

Academic and health outcomes

As noted earlier, the research examining the experiences and perceptions of queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum students in US higher education has increased significantly in the last three decades. From 1990 to 2004, scholarship focused exclusively on the ‘number’ of queer-spectrum students and the ‘prevalence’ of harassment and discrimination that they faced on campus (Rankin, 2003). The years between 2005 and 2010 brought increased visibility of sexual and gender minorities and the emergence of research examining the experiences of trans-spectrum students and literature examining intersecting identities (e.g., racial identity, spiritual identity, disability status; see Marine [2011] for a comprehensive review). Despite increased visibility and growth in the amount of research, very few queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum focused studies found their way into top-tiered higher education journals. In 2010, Renn offered that the available research was based on prevalence and that future research should focus on how the climate on college campuses influenced specific outcomes. The research focused on students’ experiences and needs (e.g., Cegler, 2012; Rankin et al., 2010; Strayhorn et al., 2008), yet little was known about the consequences of campus climate on student outcomes, including persistence to remain at an institution.

More recently (2012–2018), there is a growing body of work that examines queer-spectrum students’ health outcomes relative to their experiences (e.g., Silverschanz et al., 2008; Woodford et al., 2012) and academic outcomes (Garvey et al., 2018d). Trans-spectrum students’ experiences and relationships to academic (Woodford et al., 2017) and health outcomes (Woodford et al., 2018) are also now being explored, though substantially less than their queer-spectrum counterparts.

Currently, the US national landscape is shifting, as leading higher education research centers have begun to incorporate sexual identity and gender identity demographic variables into their respective instruments. In 2017, the Tyler Clementi Center partnered with the Center for Postsecondary Research at Indiana University, the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, the SERU-AAU Consortium led by UC-Berkeley and U-MN, the American College Health Association, and Rankin and Associates on a study of queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum student experiences in higher education.

The study examined queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum student responses on the National Survey of Student Engagement [NSSE] (2017), the Undergraduate Student Experience at the Research University Survey (Center for Studies in Higher Education [CSHE], 2017), the American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment (ACHA, 2016), and the four surveys conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute (2016), including The Freshman Survey, the Your First College Year Survey, the Diverse Learning Environments Survey, and the College Senior Survey. Combined, these analyses included the responses of 66,208 queer-spectrum students and 6607 trans-spectrum students at 918 unique four-year institutions across the USA – the largest study of this population ever undertaken (Greathouse et al., 2018).

Based upon the analysis conducted across these seven national survey instruments, it is clear that queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum student experiences are different than those of heterosexual and cisgender students across climate, health, and academic engagement. Of particular concern are findings relevant to self-assessed mental health, rates of depression and suicidal ideation, perceptions of respect for variance in sexual orientation or gender identity on each student's respective campus, frequency of exposure to harassment and discrimination, choice of major, and the differences in academic disengagement despite the engagement of integrative and reflective learning behaviors. Following is a summary of the campus climate, academic outcomes, and health outcomes across the seven surveys.

Academic outcomes

Although not directly measured, queer-spectrum students (29%) and trans-spectrum students (53%) were more likely to take a 'break of at least one term' because they felt they did not fit in on campus. In contrast, 23% of heterosexual students and 34% of cisgender students felt similarly. Twenty-nine percent of queer-spectrum students and 40% of trans-spectrum students indicated that they had considered dropping out of school. Half (50%) of queer-spectrum students and 63% of trans-spectrum students turned in coursework late compared to 37% of heterosexual students and 39% of cisgender students. Interestingly, reported GPAs (grade point averages) were very similar between groups.

Health outcomes

The significant differences in health outcomes among queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum students were alarming (Figures 1 and 2). Thirty-nine percent of queer-spectrum first-year students and 52% of trans-spectrum first-year students rated their emotional health as 'below average' compared to 12% of heterosexual first-year students and 14% of first-year cisgender students. Twenty-five percent of queer-spectrum students compared to 15% of heterosexual students reported feeling isolated on campus. Similarly, trans-spectrum students (32%) felt more isolated than their cisgender peers. Four out of five queer-spectrum students felt 'very sad' in the last 12 months and three out of five reported that they were so depressed that it was difficult to function. Among trans-spectrum students, three out of four felt 'very sad' in the last 12 months and one out of two reported that they were so depressed that it was difficult to function. Alarming, queer-spectrum students engaged in self-injury in the previous year at three times the rate (17%) of their heterosexual peers (5%). Trans-spectrum students engaged in self-injury in the previous year at over three times the rate (20%) of their cisgender peers (6%). One in five queer-spectrum students (22%) and one in four trans-spectrum students (26%) had seriously considered suicide in the past year. Comparatively, 8.2% of heterosexual students, and 8.5% of cisgender students had seriously considered suicide in the past year.

With only one exception, queer-spectrum students reported higher rates of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use than their heterosexual peers. In the case of both marijuana and tobacco products, 50% more queer-spectrum students than straight students reported

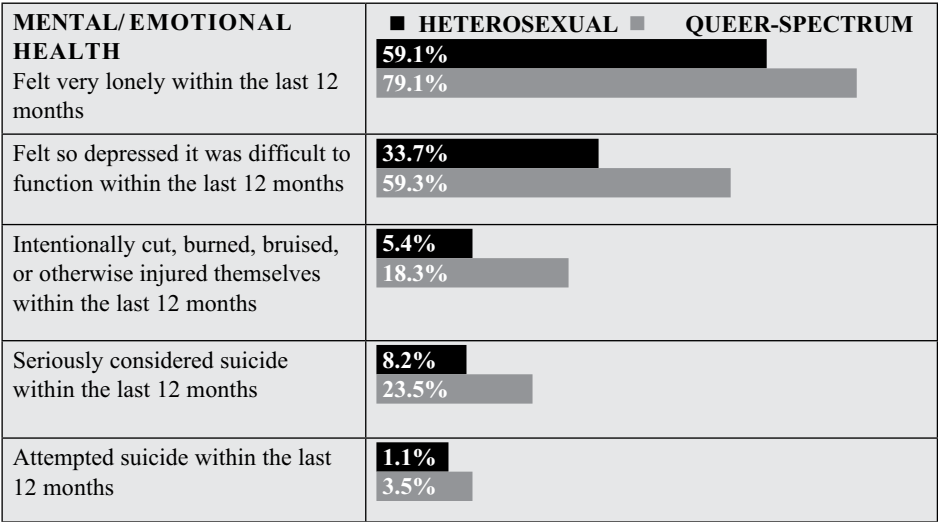


Figure 1. Comparison of mental/emotional health and self-injurious behaviors of straight/heterosexual and queer-spectrum students (2017).

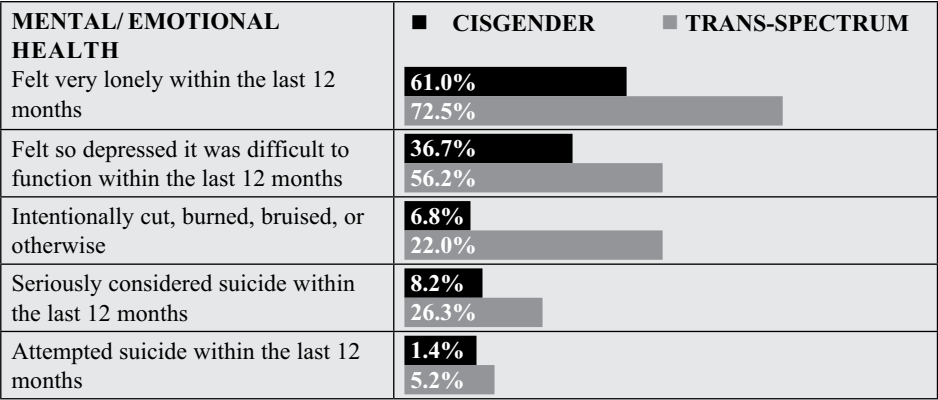


Figure 2. Comparison of mental/emotional health and self-injurious behaviors of cisgender and trans-spectrum students (2017).

using in the last 30 days. Though the overall proportion of students using ecstasy, methamphetamine, opioids, and the misuse of prescription medication is relatively low in general, the differences between queer-spectrum students and their heterosexual peers are concerning. The rate of ecstasy and other club drug use in the last 30 days was twice as high for queer-spectrum students, and the rates of methamphetamine and other amphetamine use in the last 30 days was more than twice as high for queer-spectrum students. The use of prescription opioids coupled with sedative use increases the risk of

Table 1. Comparison of academic impediments of straight/heterosexual and queer-spectrum students (2017).

Academic impediments	Straight/Heterosexual	Queer-spectrum
Anxiety	22.1%	39.1%
Depression	14.0%	31.8%
Discrimination	0.9%	4.2%
Drug use	1.6%	3.8%
Eating disorder/problem	1.2%	3.0%
Finances	6.6%	10.8%
Roommate difficulties	5.8%	9.2%
Stress	32.0%	45.3%

an opioid overdose. The rates of queer-spectrum students reporting the misuse of both prescription opioids and prescription sedatives within the last 12 months was double that of their heterosexual peers. Mirroring many of the findings among queer-spectrum students, trans-spectrum students reported higher rates of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use than their cisgender peers. The one exception is that a slightly smaller proportion of trans-spectrum students reported using alcohol in the last 30 days than did their cisgender peers. Although the overall proportion of students using ecstasy, methamphetamine, opioids, and the misuse of prescription medication is low, the differences between trans-spectrum students and their cisgender peers are of similar concern as findings for queer-spectrum peers and their straight counterparts. The rates of ecstasy and other club drug use in the last 30 days was twice as high for trans-spectrum students, and the rates of methamphetamine and other amphetamine use in the last 30 days was more than twice as high for trans-spectrum students. The use of prescription opioids coupled with sedative use increases the risk of an opioid overdose. The rates of trans-spectrum students reporting the misuse of both prescription opioids and prescription stimulants within the last 12 months was double that of their cisgender peers.

Students were asked about several things that might negatively impact their academic performance. Queer-spectrum students reported that anxiety and stress negatively impacted their academics at higher rates than their heterosexual peers. The differences were even greater for financial problems and roommate difficulties (nearly twice the rate), depression (twice the rate), drug use (more than twice the rate), eating disorders (two and a half times the rate), and discrimination (more than four times the rate) for queer-spectrum students than for their heterosexual peers (see Table 1).

Trans-spectrum students reported that anxiety and stress negatively influenced their academics at higher rates than their cisgender peers. The differences were even greater for financial problems and roommate difficulties (nearly twice the rate), depression (over twice the rate), drug use (twice the rate), eating disorders (nearly three times the rate), and discrimination (six times the rate) for trans-spectrum students than for their cisgender peers. Trans-spectrum students also reported discrimination as an academic impediment at higher rates than their queer-spectrum counterparts (see Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of academic impediments of cisgender trans-spectrum students (2017).

Academic impediments	Cisgender	Trans-spectrum
Anxiety	23.8%	39.5%
Depression	15.5%	33.7%
Discrimination	1.2%	7.3%
Drug use	1.8%	3.9%
Eating disorder/problem	1.4%	4.1%
Finances	7.1%	13.1%
Roommate difficulties	6.1%	11.1%
Stress	33.4%	44.3%

Conclusion

The past 30 years represent a significant growth in scholarship focusing on queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum students in higher education. As offered in this US retrospective, researchers have progressively shed light on different populations within queer- and trans-spectrum communities, and have increasingly examined how these individuals perceive their collegiate environments. Despite this rise in scholarship, recent literature on academic and health outcomes reveals that US higher education institutions continue to fall short on their promise to accept and nurture queer- and trans-spectrum students. For example, based upon the analyses conducted by Greathouse et al. (2018), across seven US national survey instruments, it is clear that queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum students’ experiences continue to be disparate to those of their heterosexual and cisgender peers across health and academic engagement.

The overt climate of fear that existed on US college campuses prior to the 1990s still lingers today and thus negatively shapes the experiences of queer- and trans-spectrum students (Beemyn, 2003a; Graves, 2018; Marine, 2011; Renn, 2010). Additionally, this retrospective underscores the reality that mere visibility will not address the oppressive settings present for queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum communities in higher education settings. Institutions of higher education must continue to examine outcomes beyond grade point average, retention, and graduation rates to measure student success. When only 75% of queer-spectrum students and 65% of trans-spectrum students report feeling a sense of belonging on campus, higher education is obligated to take notice. We encourage higher education leaders to review policies and programs at their respective institutions, speak with queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum students about their experience on campus, and engage all members of the campus community in the creation and maintenance of an affirming and nurturing campus climate for all.


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Note

1. *Freshman* is not a gender inclusive term and is subject to criticism regarding genderism (Bilodeau, 2009).

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Résumé

A Retrospective of LGBT issues on U.S. College Campuses: 1990-2020 (IS-19-0012)

Dans cette brève rétrospective relative aux questions LGBT sur les campus des universités américaines entre 1990 et 2020, nous passons d'abord en revue les profonds changements intervenus dans le langage utilisé pour « définir » les personnes au sein de ces communautés. Étant donné le caractère fluide et évolutif du langage employé dans les communautés sexuelles et de genre minoritaires, il apparaît fondamental d'examiner comment les membres de ces communautés sont désignés, et qui se retrouve par là-même en position centrale. Nous employons les expressions *queer-spectrum* (« spectre queer ») et *trans-spectrum* (« spectre trans ») pour respecter la façon dont chaque personne choisit de s'identifier plutôt que de les placer dans des catégories fixes et socialement construites de sexualité et de genre. Puis nous étudions comment la conjoncture a évolué dans l'enseignement supérieur afin de soutenir les étudiants qui se situent sur le spectre *queer* et *trans*. Enfin, nous nous intéressons à la recherche portant sur le vécu de ces étudiants sur leur campus et l'influence de la conjoncture sur des résultats spécifiques. À travers cette rétrospective, il apparaît nécessaire que les chercheurs qui s'intéressent à l'enseignement supérieur continuent d'étudier les résultats qui faciliteront la réussite des populations étudiantes qui se situent sur le spectre *queer* et *trans*.

Mots-clés

Enseignement supérieur, homosexualité, justice sociale, sexualité

Resumen

A Retrospective of LGBT issues on U.S. College Campuses: 1990-2020

En esta breve retrospectiva de temas LGBT en los campus universitarios de EE. UU. entre 1990 y 2020, primero se revisan los profundos cambios en el lenguaje utilizado para “definir” a las personas dentro de estas comunidades. Teniendo en cuenta el carácter fluido y evolutivo del lenguaje que se utiliza en las comunidades de minorías sexuales y de género, es crucial examinar cómo se nombra a los miembros de estas comunidades y quiénes se encuentran en la posición central como consecuencia de ese etiquetaje. Se usan los términos *queer-spectrum* (espectro *queer*) y *trans-spectrum* (espectro *trans*) para reconocer cómo los individuos eligen identificarse a sí mismos en lugar de ubicarlos en categorías fijas de sexualidad y género socialmente establecidas. A continuación, se explora cómo ha cambiado el clima en la educación superior para apoyar a los estudiantes de espectro *queer* y *trans*. Finalmente, se examina la investigación sobre cómo los estudiantes de espectro *queer* y *trans* viven su experiencia en los campus y la influencia del clima en algunos resultados específicos. Esta retrospectiva sostiene que los estudiosos de la educación superior deben continuar examinando los resultados que facilitan el éxito para las poblaciones de estudiantes de espectro *queer* y *trans*.

Palabras clave

Educación superior, homosexualidad, justicia social, sexualidad